



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Sweet-Ione Vegetation Management Project

Newport & Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts

Colville National Forest

Recreation Resource Report

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1.0 Introduction

This document is submitted as part of the analysis file for the Sweet-Ione Environmental Assessment. Knowledge of the planning area was developed through field inventory of recreation resources. The analysis in this report focuses on the potential effects to the following recreation resources: winter recreation, dispersed recreation and Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs).

All proposed fuel and vegetation activities are analyzed within this report since these activities may affect recreation opportunities within the project area.

Recreation resources are not directly related to the purpose and need for this project and were not identified as being an issue during scoping for this project.

1.1 Regulatory Framework

1.1.1 Land Management Plan

Forest-wide direction for Forest Transportation System – Access System (AS) is found on pages 71-74 and Recreation (REC) is found on pages 85-87 of the Colville National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan, USDA 2019). Guidance specific to designated management areas (MA) begins on page 93 of the forest plan. The forest plan states that the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS, USDA 1987) will be used to identify compatible uses in the various management areas. ROS is the basic framework for inventorying, planning and managing recreation resources within forest environments.

The project area provides recreation compatible with roaded natural and rural ROS classes. Snowmobiling, dispersed camping and road access are consistent with these settings.

Table 1 displays the various MAs located in the project area.

Table 1. Land ownership and CNF Forest Plan (2019) management areas in the Sweet-Ione project area

Ownership	Forest Plan management area	Management emphasis	Timber harvest permitted?	Approx. acres
National Forest System (NFS)	Backcountry	Provide non-motorized recreation opportunities	No, consistent with RACR ¹	1,528
NFS	Focused Restoration	Restore ecological integrity and ecosystem function	Yes	5,825
NFS	General Restoration	All areas not included in another management area	Yes	11,347
NFS	Scenic Byway	Protect scenic values and recreation use within 0.5 mile of the International Selkirk Loop	Yes, in support of scenery mgt. objectives	165
NFS	Riparian Mgt. Areas (overlay with other management areas)	Aquatic and riparian dependent resources	Yes, in support of desired conditions	TBD
Total NFS				18,865
Private, WA Dept. of Natural Res.	NA	timber production	Yes, according to WA forest practices	1,569

¹ Roadless Area Conservation Rule (2001)

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Ownership	Forest Plan management area	Management emphasis	Timber harvest permitted?	Approx. acres
Project area				20,434

The forest plan lists the desired conditions (DC), objectives (OBJ), standards and guidelines (SG) for each of these management areas and provides specific management direction for the Access System, Recreation, and Scenery Resources.

Pertinent forest plan standards and guidelines relative to recreation in the Sweet-Ione project area are listed below.

1.2 Recreation Management Direction

1.2.1 Desired Conditions

The desired conditions from the forest plan that are relevant to this project include:

MA-DC-ARS-01. Resource Conditions

Administrative and recreation sites are places where structures and human-caused vegetation changes may be seen but they do not dominate the view or attract attention. The scenic integrity objectives would range from low to moderate to high with seed tree orchards potentially being in the low range and in administrative or developed recreation sites in the moderate to high scenic integrity levels. Ecological conditions (including wildlife, aquatic, soil, and vegetation) and landscape appearances can be outside of their natural range.

Human activities in the areas visible for administrative and recreation sites (foreground to middle ground, 300 feet to 4 miles) should not attract attention or stand out, and the landscapes should appear natural (moderate to high scenic integrity). Vegetation can be manipulated to accommodate occupancy and use, and to protect or enhance recreational opportunities. Forest vegetation in administrative and recreation sites is healthy (species, size, and age) and complements administrative and recreational activities, scenery, and the setting is often, but not always, roaded to facilitate administrative and/or public use of the area.

Administrative and recreation sites are designed and managed to meet the Roaded Natural ROS classification and the assigned scenic integrity objective for the area in which they are located.

MA-DC-ARS-02. Setting and Activities

- The setting is often, but not always, roaded to facilitate administrative and/or public use of the area. Administrative and recreation sites are designed and managed to meet the Roaded Natural ROS classification and the assigned scenic integrity objective for the area in which they are located.
- Recreation sites provide opportunities for people to camp, obtain information, access trails and water bodies, and participate in day-use activities (such as picnic areas, fishing piers, boat launches, scenic overlooks, wildlife viewing sites, interpretive/heritage sites).
- Administrative sites provide the facilities necessary to carry out the mission of the Forest Service and can include offices, communication sites, storage areas, housing, stock corrals, pastures, and weather stations.

FW-DC-AS-02. Trail System – Motorized and Non-Motorized

- A variety of summer and winter system trails provide a range of difficulty and seclusion levels for the various user types; are located in diverse ecological, geological, and scenic settings; and minimize user conflicts and impacts to natural and cultural resources. Destination and loop opportunities of various lengths are available for a variety of uses.

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- A maintained and environmentally sound trail system is in place, providing for user safety and access to locations of interest and the use of the Forest (e.g., recreation, minerals, vegetation treatment, and fire protection) while protecting the natural and cultural resources through which the trail system passes.
- Motorized access and travel occurs on a well-designed system of designated National Forest System roads and motorized trails that provide loop-riding opportunities, connect trail systems, access communities, and link with popular dispersed camping areas.

FW-DC-AS-06. Developed Recreation Sites

Roads accessing developed recreation sites (such as campgrounds, day use sites, and trailheads) are maintained at a level generally accessible by passenger vehicle.

MA-DC-BC-01. Vegetation

The landscape is natural appearing. It contributes to the variety of native plant communities and the structure as defined in desired conditions for vegetation, aquatic, and wildlife habitats. The desired conditions for vegetation are achieved through a combination of ecological processes and management activities. While the landscape is predominantly natural appearing, a few locations have a vegetation structure that is altered to contribute to the recreational setting such as openings created and retained for scenic views. The scenic integrity objective is high.

MA-DC-BC-03. Recreation Setting and Activities

These areas display natural landscapes where generally only ecological changes occur (high scenic integrity) and provide primitive or semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities. They provide an unroaded setting for a variety of summer and winter recreational opportunities. Seasonal use restrictions occur for the purpose of resource protection and recreation management. Human-caused changes from management actions related to recreation are limited in scale, generally not visibly evident, and reflect a semi-primitive non-motorized recreational opportunity setting.

MA-DC-BC-06. Existing and Proposed Uses

Existing and proposed recreation activities enhance or maintain recreation opportunities that trend toward the semi-primitive non-motorized/primitive end of the ROS.

MA-DC-GR-03. Recreation Settings and Activities

These areas provide settings for a variety of developed and dispersed summer and winter recreation activities. Seasonal use restrictions occur for the purpose of resource protection and recreation management. Recreation use is generally dispersed and/or located at recreation developments, such as campgrounds. Human-caused changes from management actions related to recreation are limited in scale, generally not visually evident, and reflect a roaded natural recreational opportunity setting.

FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences

- The Forest provides a spectrum of high quality, nature-based outdoor recreational settings and opportunities varying from primitive to urban and dispersed to developed, where visitors can experience the biological, geological, scenic, and cultural resources of the Forest, with an emphasis on the natural-appearing character of the forest.
- Dispersed recreation opportunities are available (such as camping, backcountry skiing, boating, mushroom and berry picking, hunting, and fishing) and dispersed recreation sites (such as campsites, vistas, and parking areas) occur in a variety of ROS classes throughout the Forest.
- Facilities for developed and dispersed recreation activities are appropriate for the ROS class and scenic integrity objective of the location and are designed to protect natural and cultural resources.

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- Access, parking, regulations, orientation, and safety information are in place to provide safe and enjoyable developed and dispersed recreation experiences.
- Inventoried roadless areas maintain their overall roadless character (see FEIS appendix F for maps of roadless areas).
- Recreation activities occur within the ability of the land to support them and with minimal user conflicts.
- Recreation enhances the quality of life for local residents (such as social interaction, physical activity, and connection with nature), provides tourist destinations, and contributes monetarily to local economies.
- Recreation opportunities provide for a variety of skill levels, needs, and desires in partnership with recreation permit holders, private entities, volunteer groups, community groups, and State, Federal, and Tribal governments.
- Visitors can easily access information about recreation activities and safe and proper use of the Colville National Forest.
- Recreation use does not negatively affect wildlife habitat and populations. Negative interactions between people and wildlife are minimized.
- The Colville National Forest is free from vandalism and refuse.
- “Leave No Trace” principles are practiced.

1.2.2 Guidelines and Standards

FW-GDL-AS-01. Winter Use of Roads

In the winter, when and where specified, over-the-snow recreational use (either motorized or non-motorized) may be accommodated. Roads may be plowed to accommodate management activities such as winter logging or access to winter recreation sites such as Sno-Parks.

FW-GDL-AS-03. Over-snow Vehicle Use on Roads

Over-snow vehicle use should be discontinued for the season when roads no longer allow for continuous over-the-snow travel to protect the road base.

MA-GDL-ARS-02. Resource Management Applicable Guidance

Forest-wide desired conditions and design criteria for vegetation (with the exception of the Biological Legacies plan components for snags and coarse woody debris), water resources, riparian management areas, wildlife and soils should be implemented when making management decisions in administrative and recreation sites. These resource decisions should be integrated into the sustainable design of the site and allow for human health and safety and the full functionality of the site for human use and occupancy. Coarse woody debris may be retained or removed from a site when it contributes to, or interferes with, site design, delineation, or use.

FW-GDL-REC-01. Recreation Opportunities

- Recreation-related project-level decisions and implementation activities should be consistent with mapped classes and setting descriptions in the ROS and meet appropriate screening and SIOs.
- Food and other items that attract wildlife should be managed to prevent reliance on humans and to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.
- Constructed features should be maintained to standard or removed when no longer needed.

FW-GDL-REC-02. Dispersed Recreation

In dispersed areas, the priority for facilities or minor developments should be access and protection of the environment, rather than the comfort or convenience of the visitors.

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FW-GDL-AS-06. Prohibition on Road Construction and Reconstruction in Inventoried Roadless Area

- Road construction and reconstruction activities will comply with requirements of the Roadless Area Rule in effect at the time project-level decisions are made. As of the implementation of this forest plan, the Roadless Area Rule in effect is the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. In this rule, direction on road construction and reconstruction activities can be found in Subpart B of 36 CFR 294.12(b).
- Maintenance of classified roads is permissible in inventoried roadless areas per 36 CFR 294.12 (c). See FEIS Appendix F for maps of inventoried roadless areas.

MA-STD-ARS-02. Vegetation Management

Vegetation, such as hazard trees, that threatens visitor safety at the site must be felled or removed. Vegetation or excess fuels that interfere with the primary use of the site must be treated through methods that retain the primary purpose of the site. This includes, but is not limited to, mechanical vegetation treatments or the use of fire.

MA-STD-BC-01. Motor Vehicle Use

- Motor vehicle use is prohibited. The following vehicles and uses are exempt from the motor vehicle use prohibition:
 - Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations
 - Limited administrative use by the Forest Service
 - With written authorization

2.0 Analysis Framework

2.1 Topics and Issues Addressed in This Analysis

2.1.1 Recreation Issues

Winter Recreation – project activities that occur in the winter have the potential to impact snowmobile recreation on the designated groomed and ungroomed snowmobile routes within the project area as well as routes adjacent to the project area. The groomed snowmobile routes are managed cooperatively by the Forest Service, Washington State Parks and local snowmobile club grooming councils.

Dispersed Camping – road closures or realignments as well as harvest units proposed with this project have the potential to remove access to or modify established dispersed campsites.

Road Access – road closures proposed with this project would reduce the miles of open routes available for motorized recreation.

Backcountry - project activities adjacent to the designated area could impact roadless characteristics Sale unit boundaries which are not adequately delineated could result in logging operations occurring in the designated IRA.

Table 2. Resource indicators and measures for assessing effects to recreation

Resource Element	Resource Indicator	Measure	Used to address: P/N, or key issue?	Source
Winter recreation	Designated groomed snowmobile routes	Miles of groomed routes impacted by project activities	No	Forest Plan Guideline <i>FW-GDL-AS-01 Winter Use of Roads</i> , page 73.

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Resource Element	Resource Indicator	Measure	Used to address: P/N, or key issue?	Source
Winter recreation	Designated ungroomed snowmobile routes	Miles of groomed routes impacted by project activities	No	Forest Plan Guideline <i>FW-GDL-AS-01 Winter Use of Roads</i> , page 73.
Camping	Dispersed campsites	Number of dispersed campsites adjacent or within harvest units	No	Forest Plan Desired Condition <i>FW-DC-REC-01 Recreation Settings & Experiences</i> , page 85-86; Forest Plan Guidelines <i>FW-GDL-REC-01 Recreation Opportunities</i> , page 86-87.
Road access	Open routes	Miles open to all motorized vehicles (including OHVs)	No	Forest Plan Desired Condition <i>FW-DC-AS-01 Access System</i> , page 71.
Road access	Open routes	Miles open to highway legal (full-sized) vehicles only	No	Forest Plan Desired Condition <i>FW-DC-AS-01 Access System</i> , page 71.
Road access	User-created roads & OHV trails	Miles of illegal routes	Decommission 8.0 miles	Forest Plan Desired Condition <i>FW-DC-AS-01 Access System</i> , page 71.
Backcountry (IRA)	Change in roadless characteristics	Change in acres suitable for designation as an inventoried roadless area	No	Forest Plan Desired Condition <i>MA-DC-BC-03 Recreation Settings & Activities</i> , page 100; Forest Plan Desired Condition <i>MA-DC-BC-06 Existing & Proposed Uses</i> . Page 100. Law – 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

2.2 Methodology

The recreation analysis for this project was based on professional judgement and assumes that all standard practice and project design elements would be followed. No models were used to support the analysis for this project.

2.2.1 Information Sources

The analysis was supported through information contained in the Forest's GIS and INFRA databases and current field data.

2.2.2 Spatial and Temporal Context for Effects Analysis

The spatial boundaries for analyzing the effects to recreation resources is mostly in the Sweet-Ione project area. The cumulative effects of the project to snowmobiling will be analyzed over the entire groomed and ungroomed routes that pass through the project area, since the project could affect use of these routes.

The temporal boundaries for analyzing the effects (direct, indirect, and cumulative) to recreation resources are 5-10 years. Five years is the standard timber sale contract period. An additional five years may be

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needed to implement all post-sale work such as prescribed burning activities, which frequently require additional time to meet approved burning windows so resource objectives can be met. However, the timeline associated with the immediate effects of harvesting or burning within specific units on recreation resources are generally short-term (less than 1 year).

3.0 Existing Condition

The Sweet-Ione project area currently provides a number of recreation opportunities that are typically located near roads. The most prominent forms of dispersed recreation (in no order of importance) occurring within the planning area include camping, hunting, berry picking, firewood gathering, snowmobiling, and Off-Highway Vehicle use.

The project area is one of the lesser used areas for dispersed recreation on the Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts during the summer and fall seasons. However, snowmobiling in the area is very popular on the Mill Creek Trail System (designated groomed route) as well as the designated ungroomed routes. See map in Appendix A.

Table 3. Resource indicators and measures for the existing condition

Resource Element	Resource Indicator	Measure	Existing Condition
Winter recreation	Designated groomed snowmobile routes	Miles of available groomed routes within project area	4 miles
Winter recreation	Designated ungroomed snowmobile routes	Miles of available groomed routes within project area	18 miles
Camping	Dispersed campsites	Number of available dispersed campsites	19 high-value campsites 30 lesser used sites
Road access (NFS only)	Open routes	Miles open to all vehicles (including OHVs)	21 miles
Road Access (NFS only)	Open routes	Miles open <u>only</u> to highway legal vehicles (full-sized)	52 miles
Backcountry (IRA)	Change in roadless characteristics	Acres suitable for designation as an Inventoried Roadless Area under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.	1,528 acres

3.1 Dispersed Camping

Dispersed camping is defined as camping outside of a designated developed campground where there are few or no amenities. Dispersed camping in the project area primarily occurs from Memorial Day through the fall hunting seasons. Most dispersed campsites within the project area are located in small openings adjacent to Forest System roads, with a few campsites located in pullouts along the edge of the road prism or at the end of system roads. Campsites are primarily accessed by motorized vehicles with users either tenting or RV camping. Off-road ingress/egress to dispersed sites is allowed along designated roads shown on the Motorized Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) up to a distance of 300 feet from the centerline of the road. Cross-country off-road motorized travel is prohibited on the forest.

A total of 19 high-value dispersed campsites were inventoried within the project area boundary. Indicators such as exposed mineral soil, soil compaction, developed ingress/egress routes, tree root exposure, damaged

trees, well-used rock fire rings, garbage, sanitation problems, rutting, and long-term knowledge of the sites were used to categorize sites.

Dispersed sites on the CNF, including this project area, have consistently had issues with trash/sanitation problems, damage to nearby trees, and illegal OHV use. In the past, education and enforcement efforts to correct these problems had not been very successful due to reduced recreation staffing and budget cutbacks.

The majority of inventoried sites were located in stands of mixed conifers that provided good screening and the opportunity for shade. Based on the level of soil disturbance, rock fire ring construction, tree damage, and user created structures (toilets, benches, game hangers, etc.), it appears that the higher-value sites receive use on a regular basis throughout the summer and fall months and are popular with the public.

There are also 30 inventoried dispersed campsites located in the planning area that appear to be used on an irregular basis, either as an opportunistic place to set up camp before dark, or during hunting season when dispersed campsites within the planning area receive their heaviest use. This assessment is based on the lack of soil disturbance, small fire rings, lack of tree scarring, and high degree of vegetation growing in the fire rings and campsite area.

3.2 Hunting

Moderate to high intensity hunting (primarily deer, elk and turkey) activities occur throughout the planning area. Hunting opportunities are aided by the extensive Forest Service road system that provides easy access to most of the planning area. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has designated a wide range of hunting seasons for different game species. The different seasons provide hunters with a number of options as well as quality experiences within the project area.

3.3 Berry Picking

Berry picking occurs throughout the planning area and is supported by the Forest Service road system. This activity peaks during mid to late summer depending on elevation and is focused on the huckleberry season.

3.4 Winter Recreation

The project area contains four miles of designated groomed snowmobile trail identified as part of the 76-mile Mill Creek Trail System which lies mostly west of the project area. Southwest of the project area and connected to the Mill Creek Trail System lies the Flodelle/Tacoma System (62 miles). Both systems comprise 138 miles of winter trails. These two systems are referred to as the Gillette Recreation Area and comprise 30 percent of the designated groomed snowmobile systems on the forest. These routes are very popular among local and regional users during the winter months and are groomed from December 1 to March 31. The snowmobile program on the forest is operated in conjunction with Washington State Parks as well as local snowmobile club grooming councils. The project area also contains 18 miles of designated ungroomed routes. One of these routes connects the town of Ione to the town of Metaline. These routes are popular with the local communities.

3.5 OHV Recreation

There are 73 miles of open roads in the project area. Of these, 52 miles are open to highway legal vehicles only, and 21 miles are open to all vehicles (including OHVs). In addition, there are 19 miles of county roads that are open to all vehicles, with speeds of 35 miles or less. All of these roads are used by recreationists for OHV riding, driving for pleasure, viewing wildlife and natural features, hunting and berry picking.

The Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) designates which NFS roads are open to public use, by vehicle type. The following sections describe the various recreational uses of the open road and motorized trail systems.

Motorized recreation use has grown considerably on the forest over the past few decades, as is the case across the United States. Cordell et al. (2008) reported that between 1982 and 2001 off-road vehicle use was one of the fastest growing activities in the country. OHV use in the project area appears to be consistent with this trend. The majority of individuals who participated in OHV use (either as their primary or secondary activity) on the CNF are from the local and regional area. In 2014, approximately 85% of individuals traveled less than 100 miles from home to reach their destination on the Forest and approximately 50% traveled less than 50 miles (USDA 2014).

The majority of the OHV routes on the CNF consists of roads open to mixed-use (open to all motorized vehicles) which were constructed for resource extraction or vegetation management. This has resulted in dead-end routes and fewer long-distance loop opportunities desired by motorized recreationists.

Successful OHV trail systems generally provide sufficient riding distance for the duration of a visitor's stay. For many riders, the time spent navigating a few difficult miles may provide a quality experience; variety of scenery and terrain types also contribute to perceptions of quality (Crimmins, 2006).

The CNF Motorized Vehicle Use Map (MVUMs) were introduced in 2005. These maps display roads and trails that are designated as open to motorized travel, and the types of vehicles permitted on each route. Off-road travel, including game retrieval, is prohibited. OHVs are allowed ingress and egress to dispersed sites within 300 feet of an open route. The MVUMs are updated to reflect any changes on a regular basis. Based on the most current MVUM (2017), there are a number of routes within the project area open to OHVs.

Light to moderate OHV use has occurred historically throughout the planning area. Designated routes for OHV use within the Sweet-Ione project area shown on the CNF Northeast Area MVUM which provide access to much of the planning area and some loop riding opportunities when connected by the County road system. OHV riding opportunities within the planning area are readily available and have been used in the past for non-commercial OHV group rides.

There continues to be interest from local OHV users and the Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association to provide for a system of OHV trails on the Forest that connects communities and provides loop riding opportunities.

3.6 Motorized and Non-motorized Trails

There are no motorized or non-motorized system trails within the Sweet-Ione project area.

3.7 Developed Recreation

The Hanks Butte Sno-Park and OHV Trailhead is the only developed recreation site in the project area. This site is located in the southeast section of the project area adjacent to the Hanks Butte Road (County Road 3140). It is comprised of 10 parking spaces, a vault toilet and information board. The trailhead was constructed in 2008 using grant funding from the Washington State Recreation Conservation Office. This site receives low to moderate usage depending on the season of use. This facility was designated by Washington State Parks as a sno-park in 2021.

3.8 Backcountry / Inventoried Roadless Area

The Sweet-Ione project area includes approximately 1,528 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area identified in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This roadless area was also identified during the RARE I and RARE II roadless area review and evaluations completed in 1972 and 1977. The 1528 acres are managed in the Forest Plan as Backcountry.

4.0 Environmental Consequences

4.1 Direct and Indirect Effects of No Action

4.1.1 Winter Recreation

There would be no change in the miles of available designated groomed and ungroomed snowmobile routes in the project area.

4.1.2 Camping

The availability of dispersed camping opportunities would remain the same and the setting in which those opportunities exist would remain reasonably unaltered for the foreseeable future. Over time the lack of treatments (thinning, shaded fuel breaks) to existing stands may lead to conifer encroachment into meadow areas. The number of management created openings (old landings, borrow sites, road pullouts, etc.) that are popular for dispersed camping remain the same. The availability of campsites suitable for larger recreational vehicles, large group camps (i.e., multi-family hunting camps) and those individuals desiring partial to full sun camping opportunities during the spring and fall months would remain the same.

4.1.3 Road Access

There would be no change in the miles of open motorized routes in the project area, or the types of vehicles allowed on open routes. Recreation opportunities (fishing, picnicking, berry picking, hunting, sightseeing, driving for pleasure, firewood gathering, snowmobiling, Nordic skiing, and snowshoeing) facilitated by the existing motorized routes would remain the same. The setting in which these opportunities exist would remain reasonably unaltered for the foreseeable future.

No immediate change would occur in the quality of the OHV riding experience on the road systems within the project area. The availability of OHV riding opportunities which are legally designated on the forest per the MVUM would remain the same and the setting in which those opportunities exist would remain relatively unaltered for the foreseeable future. Legal and illegal OHV use could increase slowly as the area's population increases, depending on external factors such as the state of the economy (local job market), population increases and fuel prices. The potential for erosion and weed spread along non-designated OHV routes could increase as the number of such routes expand over the years.

4.1.4 Backcountry / Inventoried Roadless Area

Roadless area characteristics include resources or features that are often present in and characterize inventoried roadless areas, including:

No immediate change would occur to the roadless area characteristics listed above associated with the 1,528 acres of inventoried roadless area (Abercrombie-Hooknose) within the Sweet-Ione project area if no action is implemented. If no action is taken, then existing vegetative, cultural, landscape, recreation opportunities, habitat, soil, water, and air quality conditions would remain unaltered and there would be no new forest system roads or commercial harvest within the boundaries of the roadless areas.

Over time, however, the likelihood of a large fire event within the planning area would increase as dead fuels continue to build-up on the forest floor and ladder fuels continue to grow in the understory. Should a large fire event occur, the basic roadless area character (no roads and no commercial timber harvest) would still apply to the IRA within the Sweet-Ione project area and there would likely be no reduction in the number of acres that would be suitable for designation as an Inventoried Roadless Area under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

4.2 Direct and Indirect Effects of the Proposed Action

Table 4. Resource indicators and measures for Proposed Action

Resource Element	Resource Indicator	Measure	Proposed Action
Winter recreation	Designated groomed snowmobile routes	Miles of groomed routes impacted by timber harvest	miles within project area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the 76-mile Mill Creek Trail System
Winter recreation	Designate ungroomed snowmobile routes	Miles of groomed routes impacted by timber harvest	18 miles within project area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> additional miles outside project boundary
Camping	Dispersed campsites	Number of dispersed campsites adjacent or within harvest units	19 high value campsites 30 other inventoried sites
Road access	Open routes	Miles open to all vehicles (including OHVs)	Increase 1.5 miles open roads
Road access	Open routes	Miles open <u>only</u> to highway legal vehicles (full-sized)	Decrease 5.0 miles open roads
Road access	User-created roads & OHV trails	Miles of illegal routes	Decommission 8.0 miles
Backcountry (IRA)	Change in roadless characteristics	Acres suitable for designation as an IRA under 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule	No change

4.2.1 Winter Recreation

Designated Groomed / Designated Ungroomed Snowmobile Routes

Designated groomed snowmobile routes within the project area could be adversely affected by winter harvest activities. Plowing snow, hauling timber and moving equipment on NFS lands along groomed snowmobile routes within and outside the project area could reduce the number of miles available to the public by reducing the viability of the routes.

The majority of winter recreation use is snowmobiling on designated groomed routes. The grooming program is managed in cooperation with Washington State Parks and local snowmobile club grooming councils. Winter harvesting and hauling on these routes would reduce the quality and availability of winter recreation experiences in those areas, thus impacting the program. Short and long-term adverse impacts from harvesting operations occurring during the winter months on a continual basis would result in reduced funding for the grooming program. Closure of snowmobile routes year after year could potentially eliminate funding opportunities for grooming these trails in the future.

To address this issue, winter operations on NFS lands that would require plowing, hauling, or moving equipment on designated groomed snowmobile routes would be prohibited from December 1 to March 31.

Winter operations would only be allowed on designated ungroomed routes if approved by the district recreation specialist and district ranger. Press releases, signing, traffic control measures and other mitigation measures would be required prior to use of these routes.

4.2.2 Camping

Access to existing dispersed campsites within timber harvest units would be lost while each unit is actively being harvested or burned. Since not all units would be actively worked at the same time some dispersed campsites should be available within the project area throughout the implementation phase of the project. In addition, there are other suitable locations available in the project area that have never been used for dispersed camping in the past. If existing campsites are unavailable, the potential exists for new sites to be created and used, ensuring the opportunity for dispersed camping would be retained throughout implementation of the project.

Removal of vegetation surrounding dispersed campsites, either through harvest or burning, may lead to a long-term loss of vegetative screening between the campsites and their access roads. Dispersed campsites located near active management units may be impacted by noise, dust, smoke, and road congestion from additional commercial traffic, temporarily reducing the quality of the camping experience at those campsites. Dispersed campsites may also be impacted for several years if used as landing sites. These impacts could include soil compaction, loss of ground vegetation, expansion of the site, scarring of surrounding trees, loss of shade, slash accumulation, and scarring from pile burning. Upon completion of harvest and burning activities, the availability of sites suitable for camping should increase within the project area as a result of openings created through thinning, ladder fuel reduction, and new landings.

Work within or adjacent to dispersed camping sites during the primary recreation and hunting season (Memorial Day through November) could impact users through congestion, commercial vehicle traffic, noise, dust, and smoke. In most cases, terrain features and existing vegetation surrounding campsites would reduce these impacts. Safety concerns associated with increased traffic would likely be mitigated with standard signing used for harvest and log haul traffic activities.

Where vegetation management occurs, we would attempt to maintain adequate shade and screening at high-value dispersed sites. The intent would be to maintain the long-term health and sustainability of vegetation within the immediate foreground zone (0 - 300 feet) of high-value dispersed campsites identified and mapped by the district recreation specialist.

The use of dispersed campsites as landings would be pre-approved by the district recreation specialist. After harvest and fuel treatments are complete, cleanup of any dispersed campsites located within the harvest units would be performed. Slash from the campsite core (fire ring, parking area, tent area) would be removed, and soils disturbed by equipment operation would be leveled.

4.2.3 Road Access

The proposed action would construct 8 miles of temporary roads all of which would be closed to unauthorized use at all times. Under this alternative 3.5 miles of existing open roads would be closed to public use. The number of miles of road to be decommissioned is 9.0 miles. Net change of open existing roads within the project area is a decrease of 5.0 miles. These roads were listed on the MVUM. However, the road prism was overgrown with thick vegetation and the roads have not been drivable for many years. The existing road systems scheduled for decommissioning are segments which are either being moved out of riparian habitat conservation areas, not necessary for future forest management and are potential sources of sediment to streams. Approximately 1.5 miles of roads open to full sized vehicles only would be opened to all vehicles including OHVs. Only slight changes in OHV use patterns, opportunities or experiences are expected from the proposed level of road decommissioning associated with routes currently open to motor vehicles.

A total of 8.0 miles of user-created OHV roads/trails would be obliterated with the Proposed Action. With this action, existing levels of illegal OHV cross-country travel and closed road use would likely be reduced

within the project area. Illegal OHV use may actually increase in units if management activities open up the stands adjacent to Forest System roads or if temporary roads and skid trails are not effectively closed. To minimize this potential effect, vegetative screening would be left along roadways and temporary roads and skid trails would be effectively closed with native materials. While closure devices and management signing have been successful in reducing the volume of illegal use, these actions are based primarily on enforcement and engineering. Additional management tools based on education and providing quality riding experiences within the project area may also help reduce existing and future levels of illegal OHV use.

4.2.4 Dispersed recreation opportunities

Dispersed recreation opportunities (i.e., berry picking, hunting, driving for pleasure, mountain biking, OHV riding, geocaching, etc.) which are dependent upon motorized access should mostly see short term effects limited to the immediate area where harvest and burn activities are proposed. Short-term impacts would include dust, noise, smoke, congestion from additional commercial traffic, temporary loss of access to favorite hunting, fishing, and berry picking areas, and possibly road closures. Overall, improvements to these roads should enhance vehicle access into the project area for these numerous types of dispersed recreation, improving the recreational experience within the project area.

4.2.5 Backcountry / Inventoried Roadless Area

There would be no reduction in the number of acres suitable for designation as an Inventoried Roadless Area under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule since the affected IRA, Abercrombie-Hooknose, would not contain any new roads or commercial harvest treatments. Unit boundaries adjacent to this management area would be accurately located with a GPS unit to ensure the integrity of the management area.

4.3 Standard Practices and Project Design Elements

The following standard practices and project design elements would be adopted to minimize the effects of the project on forest recreation. These practices and elements have proven to be effective in limiting disturbance to recreation activities, and in limiting unauthorized OHV use within the project area, once implementation is complete.

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Table 5. Standard Practices for Recreation. These practices would apply to all project activities or areas that contain these features

Standard Practice	Forest Plan Desired Condition (DC), Standard (STD), Guideline (GDL)
<p>Project Timing To maintain public safety, prohibit timber harvest and log or equipment haul on the following holiday weekends: Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day. The 4th of July holiday includes at a minimum, July 3rd through July 5th. This applies to all treatment types.</p>	<p><i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85, 86)</p>
<p>Prescribed Burning Notify the public of upcoming burn operations to educate forest users of the potential for active burning and resultant smoke.</p>	<p><i>FW-DC-AIR-01. Air Quality Protection</i> (page 29) <i>FW-DC-PA-01. Information, Education and Participation</i> (page 84, 85) <i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85, 86)</p>
<p>Dispersed Campsite Access Minimize or avoid project-related use of access routes to dispersed campsites. If necessary, restore access routes to their pre-project condition. Only those access routes leading to dispersed campsites located within 300 feet of a road open to motorized use on the forest's Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) would need to be restored. Routes leading to campsites greater than 300 feet from a road and not shown as open to motorized use on the MVUM could be closed.</p>	<p><i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85, 86) <i>MA-DC-FR-03. Recreation Setting and Activities</i> (page 106 - 107) <i>MA-DC-GR-03. Recreation Settings and Activities</i> (page 109)</p>
<p>Dispersed Campsite Management High-value dispersed recreation sites identified and mapped by the District Recreation Specialist should be treated to enhance the long-term health and sustainability of the vegetation (overstory as well as understory) within the immediate foreground zone (0-300 feet) of each dispersed recreation site so that shade, screening and dust control are provided while also meeting the scenic integrity objective associated with each high-value dispersed recreation site. Use of dispersed campsites as landings would be pre-approved by the district recreation specialist. After harvest and fuel treatments are complete, perform cleanup of any dispersed campsites located within the harvest units. Remove slash from the campsite core (fire ring, parking area, tent area), and level soils disturbed by equipment operation. Use of campsites for overnight occupancy by timber sale purchasers or other</p>	<p><i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85, 86) <i>MA-DC-FR-03. Recreation Setting and Activities</i> (page 106 - 107) <i>MA-DC-GR-03. Recreation Settings and Activities</i> (page 109) <i>FW-DC-SCE-01. Maintain and Enhance Scenery</i> (page 88) <i>FW-GDL-SCE-01. Scenic Integrity Levels</i> (page 89)</p>

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Standard Practice	Forest Plan Desired Condition (DC), Standard (STD), Guideline (GDL)
contractors would be pre-approved by the district recreation specialist. Purchasers and other contractors would be required to follow all pertinent regulations in their commercial use camping permit related to proper food storage, sanitation, discharging firearms, fire restrictions, etc. The permit would also list the restoration activities required to be completed by the contractor to return the campsite to its condition prior to occupancy. Restoration activities could include soil de-compaction, seeding, tree planting, and barrier rock placement.	

These design elements are expected to be effective in limiting disturbance to existing recreation activities within the project area and in limiting additional unauthorized OHV use within the project area after implementation is complete.

Table 6. Project Design Elements Related to Recreation. These practices would apply to the identified locations

Design Element	Applicable Locations	Forest Plan Desired Condition (DC), Standard (STD), and Guideline (GDL)
<p>Designated Groomed Snowmobile Routes</p> <p>Prohibit winter operations on NFS lands from December 1 to March 31 that would require plowing, hauling, or moving equipment on a designated groomed snowmobile route.</p> <p>If winter harvest/haul operations are required for resource protection or requested by the purchaser, plow routes and operating windows will be discussed with the District Recreation Specialist and District Ranger prior to approving the request. Access will generally be limited to a single winter season. If winter logging conditions deteriorate prior to all units being completed, additional winter seasons could be authorized if approved in advance by the District Ranger.</p> <p>Routes would be plowed and used for harvest/haul operations one at a time. In addition, the District Ranger and District Recreation Specialist will attempt to identify short-term alternative routes</p>	<p>Designated groomed snowmobile routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hanks Butte Road (County Rd. 3140) <p>(The CNF recognizes it does not have jurisdiction over county roads located within the Forest.)</p> <p>If winter operations occur between December 1 & March 31 along these roads, the designated groomed route (Hanks Butte) would be affected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFS 3140440 • NFS 3140442 • NFS 3140452 • NFS 3140456 <p>Harvest units: 81,82,83,84,85,86.</p>	<p><i>FW-GDL-AS-01. Winter Use of Roads</i> (page 73)</p> <p><i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85, 86)</p> <p><i>MA-DC-FR-03. Recreation Setting and Activities</i> (page 106 - 107)</p> <p><i>MA-DC-GR-03. Recreation Settings and Activities</i> (page 109)</p>

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Design Element	Applicable Locations	Forest Plan Desired Condition (DC), Standard (STD), and Guideline (GDL)
<p>that could be groomed to off-set the loss of groomed access due to winter harvest/haul. This applies to all treatment types.</p> <p>Press releases, signing, traffic control measures and other mitigation measures would be required prior to use of these routes</p>		
<p>Designated Ungroomed Snowmobile Routes</p> <p>If winter operations are proposed on NFS lands from December 1 to March 31 that would require plowing, hauling, or moving equipment on a designated ungroomed snowmobile route, coordinate with the district recreation specialist and district ranger.</p> <p>If winter harvest/haul operations are required for resource protection or requested by the purchaser, plow routes and operating windows will be discussed with the District Recreation Specialist and District Ranger prior to approving the request. Access will generally be limited to a single winter season. If winter logging conditions deteriorate prior to all units being completed, additional winter seasons could be authorized if approved in advance by the District Ranger.</p> <p>Routes would be plowed and used for harvest/haul operations one at a time. In addition, the District Ranger and District Recreation Specialist will attempt to identify short-term alternative routes that could be groomed to off-set the loss of groomed access due to winter harvest/haul. This applies to all treatment types.</p> <p>Press releases, signing, traffic control measures and other mitigation measures would be required prior to use of these routes.</p>	<p>Designated ungroomed snowmobile routes:</p> <p>Smackout Pass Road (CR 4708) Meadow Lake Road (CR 2695)</p> <p>(The CNF recognizes it does not have jurisdiction over county roads located within the Forest.)</p> <p>NFS 1710000 NFS 1710415 NFS 1710430 NFS 1700466 NFS 1700462 NFS 1715421 NFS 1710430</p>	<p><i>FW-GDL-AS-01. Winter Use of Roads</i> (page 73) <i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85, 86) <i>MA-DC-FR-03. Recreation Setting and Activities</i> (page 106 - 107) <i>MA-DC-GR-03. Recreation Settings and Activities</i> (page 109)</p>

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Design Element	Applicable Locations	Forest Plan Desired Condition (DC), Standard (STD), and Guideline (GDL)
Snowmobile Trailheads / Parking Areas Do not block public use of snowmobile trailheads and parking areas unless agreed to by the district recreation specialist and district ranger. Submit requests for use of these sites well in advance of the snowmobiling season to allow for notification of the public and coordination with Washington State Parks and local snowmobile clubs.	Hanks Butte Junction of County Road 3140 and FR 3140420 Unit: 81	<i>FW-GDL-AS-01. Winter Use of Roads</i> (page 73) <i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85, 86) <i>MA-DC-FR-03. Recreation Setting and Activities</i> (page 106 - 107) <i>MA-DC-GR-03. Recreation Settings and Activities</i> (page 109)
Unauthorized OHV Travel Effectively close all temporary roads, existing un-drivable roads that have been re-opened, equipment trails originating from open roads, and any unauthorized roads and trails used for the project as soon as possible after the completion of management actions. The intent would be to minimize the potential for unauthorized OHV routes to become established on these routes. Closure treatments could include gates, fencing, logging slash, barrier rocks, or earthen barriers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - temporary roads - roads brushed out for the project - unauthorized roads or trails used for the project - equipment trails off open roads 	<i>FW-DC-AS-01. Access System</i> (page 71) <i>FW-DC-REC-01. Recreation Settings and Experiences</i> (page 85 – 86) <i>MA-DC-FR-03. Recreation Setting and Activities</i> (page 106 - 107) <i>MA-DC-GR-03. Recreation Settings and Activities</i> (page 109)
Wilderness-Recommended GPS any harvest unit boundaries that abut the recommended wilderness management area to ensure that no harvest activities or other treatments occur within the boundaries.	Unit: 11	<i>MA-GDL-RW-01. Wilderness Characteristics</i> (page 151) <i>MA-DC-RW-02. Retention of Wilderness Characteristics</i> (page 149)
Backcountry (IRA) GPS any harvest unit boundaries that abut the backcountry (roadless) management area to ensure that no harvest activities or other treatments occur within the boundaries.	Units: 3,4,5	<i>MA-DC-BC-03 Recreation Setting & Activities</i> , (page 100); <i>MA-DC-BC-06 Existing & Proposed Uses</i> (page 100)

4.4 Cumulative Effects - Proposed Action

There are presently no active or other planned timber sales on NFS lands in this project area. We anticipate no cumulative effects to dispersed camping and road access from other projects and activities.

4.4.1 Winter Recreation

The cumulative effects area for winter recreation is the Mill Creek and Flodelle/Tacoma snowmobile trail systems as well as the designated ungroomed routes which pass through the project area. Winter recreation opportunities may be affected by the implementation of the Sweet-Ione project and any other concurrently active timber sales located adjacent to the project area. The extent of these impacts would be directly related to agency management decisions allowing winter log haul on the snowmobile routes in question.

Closures for public safety due to winter log haul would reduce the miles of designated groomed and designated ungroomed snowmobile routes available for public use. Winter closures could displace use to other areas in the Sweet-Ione project area and adjacent areas which may lead to the perception of crowding and a decrease in user satisfaction with the winter recreation opportunities on the forest. If route closures occur in both areas at the same time, users may not have adequate alternatives for riding. There could be an associated loss of revenue to local businesses in the area.

Prohibiting plowing, hauling and moving equipment on NFS lands adjacent to designated groomed snowmobile routes from December 1 through March 31 would result in no cumulative effects.

5.0 Summary of Environmental Effects

Past vegetation management activities have generally created opportunities for greater access for recreationists on the CNF including the Sweet-Ione project area. Openings created through timber harvest along roadways are being used for dispersed camping. New roads, temporary roads and skid trails created during past activities have increased road densities allowing the recreating public greater access to the forest for hunting, dispersed camping, winter recreation and driving for pleasure.

Harvest and prescribed burning operations associated with the Sweet-Ione project would have short-term impacts to access for recreation activities such as dispersed camping, hunting, berry picking and OHV use. With the standard practices and design elements specific to recreation impacts to existing recreation sites and uses should be avoided or minimized.

The project area is popular among recreationists from local and regional communities. While some road decommissioning would occur, overall recreation use of the project area is not expected to be altered by the proposed action. In general, dispersed recreation activities within the project area are expected to increase (over existing use levels) proportionately with regional (northeast Washington and northern Idaho) population growth.

Winter recreation would be the most affected recreational opportunity in the project area if the designated, snowmobile routes are allowed to be used for winter haul routes. Continued disruption of use on designated groomed snowmobile trail systems could result in a decrease of program funding from Washington State Parks and a displacement of users to other areas. Designated ungroomed routes would also be affected if winter harvest activities are allowed.

The project area would continue to provide a spectrum of recreation experiences compatible with the Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, Semi-Primitive Motorized, Roaded Natural, and Roaded Modified ROS classes. No long-term change in the character of the recreation experience or the availability of recreation opportunities within the project area is expected. Short-term disruption to dispersed camping and OHV

activities due to localized harvest/burning activities (including temporary or permanent road closures) may occur. Harvest activities and fuels treatments would be designed to limit the exposure of CNF visitors to management activities while improving the area's ability to provide for an appropriate recreation experience, particularly during periods of expected high use by the recreating public.

6.0 Compliance with LMP and Other Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies and Plans

The Proposed Action is consistent with the Forest Plan management area direction for developed recreation, dispersed recreation, trails, off-highway vehicle use and winter recreation within management areas.

Appendix A

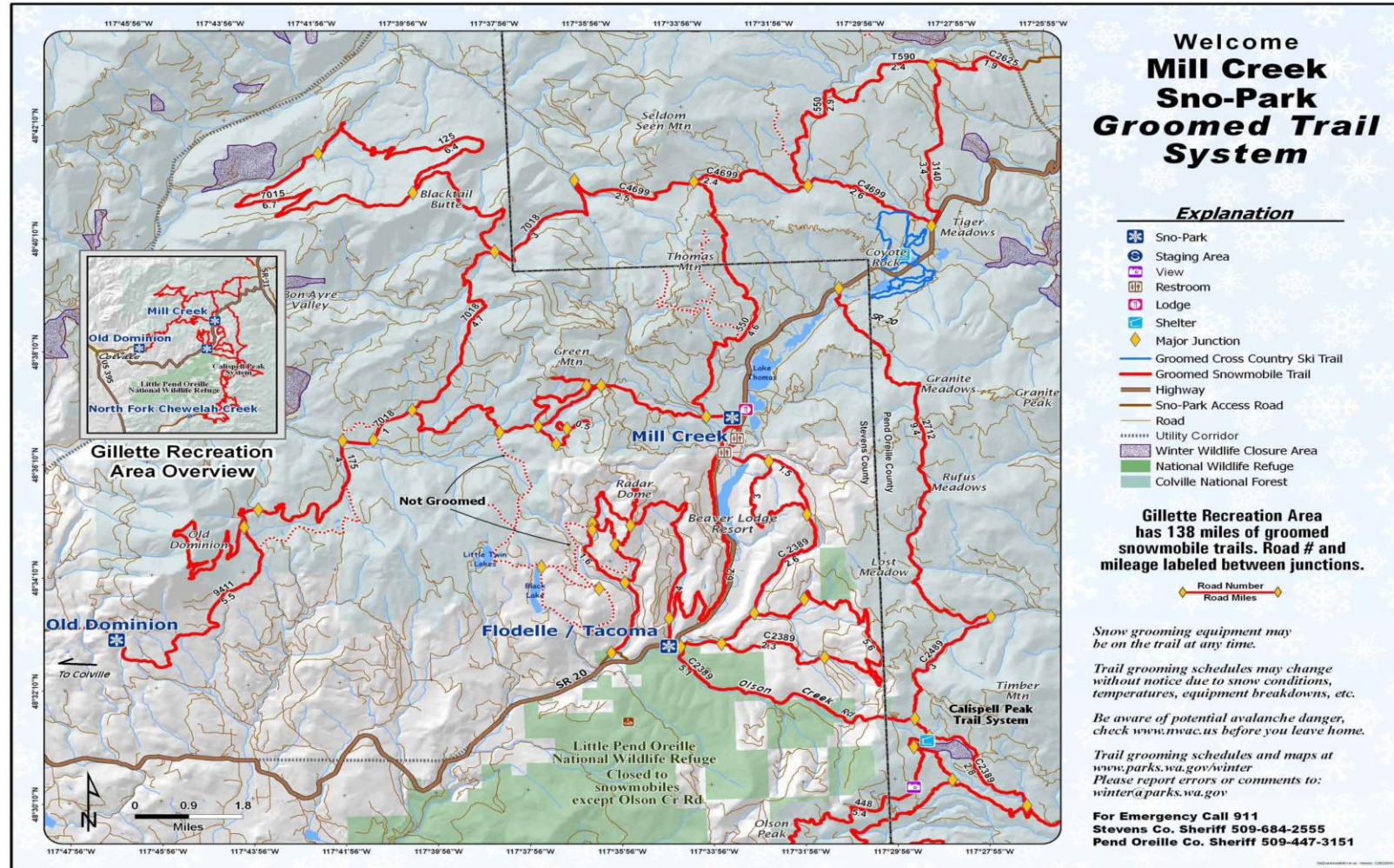


Figure 1. Mill Creek Sno-Park Groomed Trail System

7.0 References Cited

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